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Leak soup

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The U.S. Capitol is a marvelous place to go exploring, and the halls are again filled with the throngs of tourists and high school students making the annual spring pilgrimage here. In groups of thirty or more, they are led around the halls of the House of Representatives and the Senate—the two wings of the building—by red-jacketed tour guides who point out the original chamber of the Supreme Court, interpret the rich tableaux around the Rotunda, and offer tidbits of historic trivia. The climax of the tour is a visit to the gallery of the House or Senate to watch the nation's business in progress. This is sometimes a disappointment: There are rarely more than half a dozen Senators on the floor. People naturally wonder.

To be fair, not much business is transacted in the debating chambers. Usually, it is all worked out beforehand in the various committees of each house. Often, however, the consensus, if it can be called that, is worked out even before a bill gets to the committee. SALT II, for example: That evaporated in the newspapers.

Speaking of newspapers, people read them differently here. For official Washington—the bureaucrats, high-level Cabinet officers, members of Congress and their staffs, White House employees—the newspapers function as the day's early warning system. These people read the papers to find out who's shooting at them. In other words, all that stuff you might have read about "leaks damaging to na-

tional security" and the need to plug them up "by unleashing the CIA and the FBI" is so much nonsense. Things aren't often "leaked" here; they are planted. Inside information is funneled to a reporter from one bureaucrat or legislator who wants to torpedo another.

There's nothing really mysterious about all this. It's easy to distinguish a "plant" from a "leak." A plant is never followed by a prosecution. *The Washington Post's* Bob Woodward, for example, reported a few years back that King Hussein of Jordan had long been receiving a regular retainer from the CIA. Seems "sensitive," right? Not a peep from the White House. Someone wanted that out. The plant was engineered for foreign policy reasons.

Now take for a moment a couple of other revelations that made their way into the press. These were "leaks," not "plants," and it's easy to identify them. One was accomplished by Frank Snepp, a former CIA officer in Saigon. He wrote a book called *Decent Interval* which revealed, among other things, that the CIA dropped people out of helicopters, and that this agency so obsessed with secrecy had abandoned its agents and files to the North Vietnamese during the final offensive of April 1975. This was obviously a "leak," because the CIA took Snepp to court for violating his secrecy oath. Last month, the Supreme Court upheld the lower court decision and seized Snepp's earnings from the book. The most sweeping opinion by the Court was written by William Rehnquist, who was awarded his job on the Court after successfully defending, as a Justice Department attorney, the Nixon Administration's need for keeping the bombing of Cambodia secret.

Flushed with victory, the CIA and the Justice Department have decided to hound another former CIA officer with the "Snepp Statute." He is John Stockwell, another "leaker." It was Stockwell who left the agency and wrote an unauthorized book, *In Search of Enemies*, which took the wraps off secret CIA-South African collaboration in Angola in 1975. Stockwell also

disclosed that former CIA Director William Colby had lied about U.S. participation in the Angola secret war and had used Angola insurgents as well as some leading black Americans to propagandize for the war here in the United States—activity which is strictly forbidden by the CIA's charter. This, of course, was an "unauthorized leak," as opposed to the officially sanctioned kind which are the daily fare of newspapers here.

Finally, there are what we might call "syndicated plants." These do not result in penalties to their originators—quite the opposite. Henry Kissinger, in cooperation with Time, Inc., seems to have brought the "syndicated plant" to its state-of-the-art. He has reaped millions of dollars from his published memoirs, based on papers, documents, and memos compiled on Government time. This qualified as a "leak" only in the sense that Kissinger's papers, which he spirited out of Washington to the estate of his friend, Nelson Rockefeller, before leaving office, have been determined to be "classified" and beyond the reach of freedom-of-information statutes. The Supreme Court decided last month that only the Executive branch, and not a mere citizen whose taxes paid for Kissinger's papers, has the right to ask the former Secretary of State to turn them over. The White House has expressed no interest in seeing them.

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But we were talking about tourists. What they get is a light-fantastic trip through our nation's official history. Going from the House side of the Capitol to the Senate side, in fact, they pass right by some important nooks and crannies that should, but probably never will be, properly classified as national landmarks. These are the little rooms behind oak doors, off back stairwells and narrow corridors, equipped with little more than a desk, a few deep armchairs, and a bottle of bourbon or two. This is where the deals are made, where the "leaks" are fashioned, where the envelopes slide smoothly across burnished desk tops.

For all the "sunshine laws" passed in the past decade, however, I have yet to talk to a reporter who has covered one of these meetings. We're not invited. ■